

Apr 6th, 9:00 AM - 9:50 AM

Where Do I Start? Introducing College-Level Writing to Non-Traditional Students in a Summer Bridge Program

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Recommended Citation

Albert, Michelle, "Where Do I Start? Introducing College-Level Writing to Non-Traditional Students in a Summer Bridge Program" (2018). *Student Success in Writing Conference*. 1.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/sswc/2018/2018/1>

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“Where Do I Start?”

INTRODUCING COLLEGE WRITING & RESEARCH TO
NEW STUDENTS IN A SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAM

Michelle Albert
Program for Writing and Rhetoric
University of Colorado Boulder
April 6, 2018

Veteran Bridge Program



Veteran Bridge Program

assist student veterans in acclimating to the CU Boulder campus, while enhancing math, writing, and research skills in an intensive and supportive academic environment

[CU Boulder Office of Veteran Services. Summer Bridge Program](#)



Veteran Bridge Program

18 students with widely varying
backgrounds and abilities

two weeks

80 minutes per day

Photo by [Chris Barbalis](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Where do I start?



Goals

raise student confidence and lower anxiety about writing and research

give as much time as possible to practice writing

introduce campus and online resources for help with writing and research

learn what questions to ask of future instructors about writing assignments



PWR FYC Learning Objectives

- develop rhetorical knowledge
- refine and reflect on your writing process
- construct effective and ethical arguments
- develop your information literacy
- analyze texts in a variety of genres
- understand and apply language conventions rhetorically



Threshold Concepts

- writing is a social and a rhetorical activity
- writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms
- writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies
- all writers have more to learn
- writing is (also always) a cognitive activity

Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts in Writing Studies, Eds. Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle (Logan, UT: Utah University Press, 2015).



start where **they** are

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“It can be tough to go from an environment where - as an enlisted - you pretty much shut up and do your job, to one where you are expected to advocate for yourself and participate thoroughly. Just the change in mindset and structure can mess some people getting out up a lot.”

don't ask questions

question everything!



Class Overview

from the syllabus:

This two-week class is designed to introduce you to writing and research at the college level, as well as to help you transition into academic life on the CU campus. You'll learn and practice key strategies for writing and research that will help prepare you for your first-year or upper-division writing course at CU, and/or for papers you'll be writing in other classes throughout your college career.



Learning Goals *

- Understand and practice writing as a process, including brainstorming, drafting, workshopping, and revising
- Learn and practice the basics of argument, including how to write a thesis statement and use evidence and reasons to support your position
- Learn basic rhetorical concepts and begin to apply rhetorical knowledge to your own writing
- Learn and practice the basics of research, including finding and evaluating academic and popular sources and citing sources within your own writing
- Learn and practice active reading strategies
- Analyze texts in a variety of genres
- Review and sharpen language conventions, including grammar, punctuation, style, diction
- Learn about CU resources that can help you with writing and research



Learning Goals *

** This might be too ambitious for a 2-week class, but we'll see how it goes!*



Writing Assignments

Personal Narrative (600-900 words, give or take)

A first-person essay about an experience in your life that shaped your choice of major (or potential major), or your choice to go to college in general or to CU in particular.

Persuasive Essay (600-900 words, give or take)

An informal argument in which you take a stand on a debatable issue. You'll conduct research to find information to help you support your position.

First day



Writing Practice

students experience writing as a kind of practice and play, much the way they might practice and play a sport or a musical instrument

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Writing Practice Activity

introduces freewriting

gets students to think creatively and analytically

challenges “the rules”

See [this handout](#).

(I’m happy to share this with anyone interested.)



Writing Practice Activity

writing ≠ grammar



Writing Practice Activity

Only one rule: keep your hand moving.



Writing Practice Activity

You can't do it "wrong." The only way to do it "wrong" is by not doing it.



Writing Practice Activity

Writing is like _____

(make a list, 2 mins)



Writing Practice Activity

How is writing is like _____ ?

(freewrite, 6 minutes)

Rest of the program



Rules?

That there is no one set of rules for good writing. That each writing task calls for a unique set of choices. Every time you sit down to work on a project, you're writing in a different context, for a different purpose, and to a different audience. Writing well is not about following rules but about making good choices based on each specific writing task.



Well, this one rule ...

Always ask your instructor for clarification if you're unsure about what's expected!



Program Outcomes

100% of participants continued at CU through Spring 2018

The average GPA of bridge program participants at the end of the first term was 3.18

Only one participant received a course grade below a “C-” at the end of the Fall 2017 term

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Post-Program Survey

What was the most useful part about the writing program?

“Where do I start? Personally, I didn't know what to think say or do on the first day. So in two weeks writing a creative narrative, and then an MLA formatted persuasive piece I wouldn't have thought possible before then. I think just the experience of working on essays again coupled with learning library resources made for a solid foundation to plan my writing in the future.”



Summer Bridge 2017 intramural soccer team



Summer Bridge 2017 Friendsgiving



Thanks!

Questions? Feedback?

Contact Info

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